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SUBJECT: JAMAICA: ELECTION CAMPAIGN ROUND-UP NO. 4

REF: KINGSTON 1194 (021929Z AUG 07)

Summary and Analysis

1.(SBU) In this fourth round-up of election-related developments:

- Leaders debate social, economic, and leadership issues;
- On balance, an election still too close to call;
- Sporadic violence continues, as Director of Elections warns of possible postponements in two volatile constituencies;
- Risk of an even 30/30 split of parliamentary seats?
- Wild cards: Candidates not having renounced U.S. citizenship could face disqualifications from Parliament.

2.(SBU) Large-scale, orchestrated political violence of the kind which plagued the 1980 campaign, during which hundreds were killed, remains unlikely. Nevertheless, random incidents involving grass-roots supporters of the two parties could still escalate out of control in some areas; this is particularly true in the closely-contested constituencies, and, immediately after the election results are announced the night of August 27, in those which may change hands. After 18 years in power, if the PNP loses, its grass-roots supporters in some constituencies are unlikely to slip quietly into the night.
End Summary and Analysis.

First Debate:

Phillips projects steadiness on social issues

3.(SBU) Minister of National Security and Vice President of the ruling People's National Party (PNP) Dr. Peter Phillips is generally perceived to have won the first of three debates to be held in the run-up to the August 27 national election. In a forum focusing on social issues and broadcast nationally the evening of August 8, the telegenic Phillips bested Dr. Ken Baugh, the opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP)'s shadow cabinet minister for Health and the Environment. Health, education, crime, and job creation were the principal themes. Phillips stoutly defended the PNP's 18-year record, acknowledging that much remained to be done but maintaining that the PNP continued to make steady progress. Baugh, a universally respected physician, decried the poor state of Jamaica's health services and schools, while Phillips dismissed the JLP's manifesto proposals for free health care and abolition of school tuition fees as fiscally irresponsible.

Second Debate:

Shaw persuasively outlines Opposition's economic plan

4.(SBU) Minister of Finance Dr. Omar Davies and JLP shadow minister of finance and public service Audley Shaw squared off on economic issues the evening of August 10. Shaw persuasively outlined the JLP's proposals to:

- attract international investment to create jobs, enhance productivity, and boost Jamaica's anemic growth to 6-10 percent;
- improve debt and deficit management, to include full cooperation with the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank;
- root out endemic corruption in government contracting;
- abolish hospital user and education tuition fees;
- dismantle the Ministry of Local Government.

5.(SBU) For his part, Davies seemed uncharacteristically lackluster as he:

- emphasized the PNP's success in bringing inflation under control;
- insisted the country already was on track for higher growth and productivity;
- dismissed Opposition proposals on health and education as "wild promises" that would necessitate more taxes and/or borrowing.

Final Debate:
Opposition Leader outshines Prime Minister

6.(SBU) JLP Leader Bruce Golding turned in one of his more

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impressive performances within memory in debating the charismatic PSM the evening of August 11. Armed with a formidable arsenal of facts and figures, and projecting an image of confidence and calm commitment, Golding:

- objectively depicted Jamaica's anemic growth, high unemployment and crime, endemic corruption, and heavy debt burden after 18 years of PNP rule;
- convincingly outlined the JLP's strategies "to lead Jamaica out of this slump," with emphasis on attracting investment and stimulating growth by reducing the debt burden. ((Note: Septel will compare the recently-released manifestos of the two major parties. End Note.))

7.(SBU) PSM derided the Opposition's health and education proposals, claiming that "this new Jamaica has no time to waste on wild experiments....there is no time to listen to negative voices." She reiterated her claim "to balance the books, and also to balance people's lives," and depicted Golding as unreliable because of his history of breaking with, and subsequently returning to, the JLP. She had difficulty in responding to the Opposition Leader's pointed queries regarding her retention of the controversial Minister of Industry, Technology, Energy, and Commerce Phillip Paulwell, who has been at the center of a series of alleged imbroglios (reftel). Addressing a group of supporters on August 13, PSM tacitly acknowledged that she had been bested in the debate by dismissing Golding as a "profiler," claiming that "the people of Jamaica will be sending him into official political retirement on August 27."

On Balance: Still Too Close to Call

8.(SBU) The ruling PNP continues to hold a narrow 3.5 percentage point lead over the opposition JLP, according to the latest Observer/Don Anderson poll taken July 27-30. Speaking on the radio talk show "Breakfast Club," Anderson reiterated that all signs point to a tight race in which as many as 25 of Jamaica's 60 parliamentary seats may be won by narrow margins. Research for the "Sunday Gleaner" newspaper published August 12 suggests that 20 seats will

determine the outcome, of which 11 are concentrated in the central county of Middlesex, in the parishes of St. Ann, St. Catherine, St. Mary, Manchester, and Clarendon. Post continues to believe the race is too close to call.

Sporadic violence; warning by Director of Elections

9.(SBU) Sporadic violence, with allegations of political motivations, continues to mar the campaign:

(A) After a series of violent incidents in West Central St. Andrew and South East St. Elizabeth, the respected Director of Elections Danville Walker has warned publicly that, if he deems necessary, he will postpone the elections in these two closely contested, volatile constituencies. In the former, JLP incumbent Andrew Holness is challenged by the PNP's Patrick Roberts, while in the latter the JLP's Franklyn Witter and PNP's Norman Horne vie to succeed the outgoing MP Lenworth Blake.

(B) In St. Thomas, Trelawney, and elsewhere across the country, a number of recent shootings and stabbings have led to allegations and denials between PNP and JLP supporters and/or officials that such incidents were, or were not, politically motivated. In some cases, rather than "politically motivated," these incidents may well have been gang-related violence involving persons of known political affiliations.

10.(SBU) In Post's estimate, a return to the large-scale, orchestrated political violence that plagued the 1980 campaign, during which hundreds were killed, remains unlikely. Nevertheless, random violent incidents involving grass-roots supporters of the two parties could still escalate out of control; this is particularly the case in closely-contested constituencies, and, immediately after the election results are announced the night of August 27, those which may have changed hands.

A 30/30 Split?

11.(SBU) With the election widely perceived as likely to be the closest Jamaica has seen in many years, speculation has mounted regarding the possibility of an even split of the 60 parliamentary seats between the PNP and JLP ((Note: the much smaller: (a) National Democratic Movement (NDM), (b) a Rastafarian party, and (c) a handful of independents are widely given no chance of winning seats.

End Note.)) The Constitution contains no provisions specifically addressing a hung Parliament. The Chairman of the local observer group Citizens for Free and Fair Elections (CAFFE), Dr. Lloyd

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Barnett, has criticized the country's leaders for neglecting to minimize this risk by redistricting to ensure an odd number of seats. However, Governor General Prof. Kenneth Hall has assured the nation that, should it arise, he has (unspecified) plans for dealing with such a contingency.

Wild Cards: Possible Disqualifications of Candidates for Parliament who retain U.S. Citizenship?

12.(SBU) Meanwhile, media speculation has intensified concerning at least six (6) candidates for Parliament (3 PNP, 3 JLP) who previously may have sworn allegiance to the U.S. and have not yet renounced such allegiance - and who thus, under Section 40 of the Constitution, may be disqualified for membership in the House of Representatives (or the Senate).

13.(SBU) ((Note: Post has received several inquiries from candidates concerning renunciations of U.S. citizenship, and the Consulate General has provided the standard applicable information; however, to date no candidates actually have completed the renunciation process. Some commentators have asserted that, in order for such candidates to avoid disqualification, they would have had to complete renunciations prior to Nomination Day (August 7), rather than by Election Day (August 27). Poloff has inquired with a

respected constitutional authority; speaking off the record and on condition of anonymity, the authority confirmed that the answer depended on the interpretation of the "Representation of the Peoples Act," and that to date no court had ruled on this point-- thus leaving the question open. End Note.))

14.(SBU) Comment: If the election is as close as many observers believe it will be, the disqualification of only one or two candidates, possibly entailing protracted court cases, conceivably could be a factor in shaping, or in eventually re-shaping, Jamaica's next Government. Particularly if prospective disqualification(s) would result in the ruling party losing power, the risk of violence would be serious. End Comment.

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